

The grass roots coach!

An ode from Dan Abrahams about grassroots coaching

The grassroots coach is the greatest of psychologists...

Far greater than Pep Guardiola or Mikel Arteta. Far, far greater! Their job is much easier...they have time aplenty and money to burn on auxiliary staff

The grassroots coach has little to no time for elaborate conversation with players about mental skills. They have little to no time with their team to set values and associated behaviours. They have little to no time to 'get to know' the people who turn up for training twice a week (at best) on a wet Wednesday night.

So at the level of grassroots, the intertwined psychological and social components of coaching have to be cleverly weaved into session design and displayed within on-pitch coach behaviours and coach feedback protocols. And this is hard. It's difficult.

Perhaps it starts at the beginning. As grassroots coaches write their sessions so they need to scribe the psychosocial...

1. A mental rehearsal and teamwork exercise for one minute at the beginning – “What will a great session today look like and what one thing are you working on in your game?” A question posed...players to picture this for 30 seconds then discussed in pairs for 30 seconds...with the commitment that each pair will help each other with their requisite objectives.
2. A fun but cognitively stimulating warm-up game to start...all-body movement with communication, cooperation, and coordination – sweat and smiles, comms and creativity to set the tone. Healing mindset and cognition.

3. Next, a small-sided game with constraints and conditions that urge decisions galore...with an emphasis on a particular principle...as detailed through your WhatsApp group with the players...a huddle before play, one in a break, and then one after...your players are ready to explore the problems you've set and; find solutions. They're ready to reflect on what they've just experienced. Reflect and rehearse to remember, reflect and rehearse to remember – because that's how learning is done.
4. You empower them to drive the activity but you're close by, listening in. You can step into the huddle and make suggestions, ask questions or you can hold back and simply cast your ear across the group. You can take note of who speaks and who looks like they're socially anxious. It's all evidence for future pairings in future games. You're a human detective as well as an expert of your sport
5. And of course, you're there for psychological reminders and reinforcers. Great body language, self-talk, self-awareness, direction of attention, focus cues...psychological experience in that moment. By doing so you know that you can help them form a greater understanding of their inner world.

You see, grassroots coaches are the real psychological geniuses. Not the pros. Not the ones who make the headlines or the ones who make the big bucks...